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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001981

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/16/2017
TAGS: PGOV PTER MOPS MCAP MARR PINS PNAT IZ
SUBJECT: FOURTH ISCI SECURITY MEETING FOCUSES ON POPULAR
COMMITTEES

REF: A. BAGHDAD 1837
     ¶B. BAGHDAD 1742
     ¶C. BAGHDAD 1882

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel V. Speckhard for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C/REL-MNF-I) SUMMARY: During the fourth Coalition-Iraqi
Security Committee meeting on 11 June, Vice President Adel
Abdel Mehdi told Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel Speckhard
that leveraging the potential of local communities through
Popular Committees could fill the intelligence and security
void. The Coalition expressed concern that such an approach
could be used as a tool of repression or be infiltrated by
militias. The VP focused his comments on establishing
effective local committees, and insisted that the chances of
success are worth the risks of failure. Council of
Representatives' Security Committee President Hadi al-Amri
reaffirmed ISCI's desire to work closely with the Coalition
in establishing security. END SUMMARY.

VP: POPULAR COMMITTEES ARE TOOLS FOR PEACE

¶2. (C/REL-MNF-I) VP Abdel Mehdi emphasized that the Popular
Committee concept discussed at the June 3rd meeting (ref C)
can be an important tool for establishing stability. Such
committees, he said, could provide the missing link between
the Iraqi government and the people. The Security Group
briefly reviewed ISCI's Committee concept paper -- which had
been received the previous day and translated just before the
meeting -- envisioning groups that would ultimately report to
the Ministry of Interior and would work directly with the
Iraqi Security Forces to locate and eliminate terrorists.
They would also provide intelligence on terrorist activities,
organize neighborhood night watches, and employ youth who
might otherwise join illegal militias.

¶3. (C/REL-MNF-I) VP Abdel Mehdi emphasized that popular
committees are not a new concept; in fact, the ISCI paper
models the American 'neighborhood watch' program. To succeed,
he said, the committees would need communications equipment,
light weapons for personal security, transportation, salaries
for the leadership, and identification cards. A separate
'acceptance committee' would carefully select members based
on good character, legal standing and patriotic motivations.

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VP: CHANCE OF COMMITTEES' SUCCESS WORTH RISK OF FAILURE
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¶4. (C/REL-MNF-I) DCM affirmed Coalition interest in supporting efforts to strengthen local community involvement in improving security in their neighborhoods and welcomed the non-partisan nature of ISCI's proposal. He expressed concern, however, that sectarian groups could still use popular committees as 'tools of sectarian fear and oppression' and suggested that the joint committee explore methods that would further reduce this possibility.

¶5. (C/REL-MNF-I) The VP noted that in the current environment, sectarian forces could readily infiltrate any group. However, he believed this plan could be successful despite limited but "contained" infiltration. At a minimum, he said, it would improve the current situation. Abdel Mehdi noted Al Anbar's Salvation Front members maintain their respective political and tribal loyalties while successfully fighting Al Qaeda. Hadi al-Amri added that tribal structures should be the basis of these popular committees, noting that they already exist in Baghdad and other areas the country.

CURRENT SECURITY FORCES INEFFECTIVE

¶6. (C/REL-MNF-I) Amri cautioned against putting too much confidence in the Iraqi Security Forces. Abdel Mehdi noted that communities are already setting up their own security groups because the ISF is unable to protect them. Locals come together to guard the shrines in Karbala and al Kadimiyah, for example. There, he said, millions of pilgrims have visited with minimal problems or incidents. The Vice President stated that if the ISF played a larger role in shrine security, the communities would have addition problems

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such as militia infiltration. Amri noted local empowerment would particularly benefit Sunni communities, where activities by the security forces tend to stir up Al Qaeda elements rather than diminish them.

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DETAINEE ISSUE, BASRAH SECURITY ISSUE FOR NEXT MEETING
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¶7. (C/REL-MNF-I) MG Scott reported that General Petraeus is reviewing the list of ISCI detainees Amri delivered at an earlier meeting (REF B). Amri pressed MG Scott for a speedy resolution, noting that ISCI head Abdul Alziz al-Hakim follows this issue closely and had raised it with Vice President Cheney during his recent US visit.

¶8. (C/REL-MNF-I) Amri asked the U.S. delegation to carefully read the papers on popular committees and Sadr City security and contribute U.S. suggestions for turning these thoughts into action to the next meeting. Amri also said ISCI is interested in discussing ways to bring security to Al Basrah and may submit a paper on the issue this week. Concluding, Amri reaffirmed ISCI's desire to work closely with the Coalition in bringing security and stability to Iraq.
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